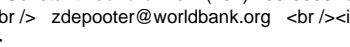




Global Agencies Call for Urgent Action to Avoid Irreversible Groundwater Depletion

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New Vision and Global Framework for Action on Groundwater Governance
The FAO, UNESCO, World Bank, GEF and International Association of Hydrogeologists this week called for action by the global community to manage the increasingly urgent depletion and degradation of limited groundwater resources. Ahead of the 7th World Water Forum in Daegu and Gyeongbuk next week, the group proposed a set of principles governments can use for better groundwater management. The 2030 Vision and Global Framework for Action represents a bold call for collectively responsible action among governments and the global community to ensure sustainable use of groundwater. For too long, groundwater governance has been an area of policy neglect, resulting in its degradation and depletion. Global groundwater abstraction has tripled over the past half century. More than a fourth of current withdrawal is non-sustainable. Widespread groundwater pollution is threatening humans and the environment. Most urban aquifers suffer from sanitation issues while coastal aquifers are exposed to saline water intrusion. Industrial pollution, pesticides and fertilizers also find their way into reservoirs. The amount of renewable groundwater is unevenly distributed across regions. Some areas, especially those with low rainfall, are at risk more than others. Withdrawal intensity is highest in large parts of China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, the US, Mexico and Europe. This could result in lost freshwater reserves at a time when groundwater storage is critical for sustaining water security and adapting to climate variability. Since time immemorial humans have sought water from the soil. But we have moved from a village being based around a well to whole cities and industries being built around groundwater," said Junaid Ahmad, Senior Director of the World Bank Group Water Global Practice. "We have learned how to dig ever deeper, pump ever harder, and how to turn deserts into breadbaskets. But we have done this without considering the rate at which our groundwater is recharged, and so we should not be surprised when our wells run dry. Much as we have invested in pumps and crops, so now we must invest in groundwater governance." Groundwater is indispensable to poverty reduction and shared prosperity. It accounts for more than a third of municipal and industrial supply and some 40 percent of the global irrigated area is serviced by groundwater. Groundwater has the potential to provide an improved source of drinking water for millions of urban and rural poor people. Many poor farmers and their families depend on it to irrigate their crops and sustain their livelihoods. The 2030 Vision and Framework for Action provides the enabling framework and guiding principles for a coordinated action among governments and organizations. Sustainable management of groundwater is key to maintaining ecosystems and adapting to climate change," said Naoko Ishii, CEO and Chairperson of the Global Environment Facility. "We can no longer take this invisible but vital source for granted; urgent action is needed to ensure its long term availability. We look forward to joining hands with partner agencies and countries to ensure water for drinking, food, cities, energy and industrial uses is available for generations to come." In response to the urgency of the situation, a product of four years of consultations with stakeholders from more than 100 countries, these principles focus on legal and institutional frameworks, policies, and plans as well as information and incentive structures for sound and effective groundwater management. This process strengthened collaboration across the international community to understand the barriers to better groundwater governance and address key regional challenges. "Collective and coordinated action is urgently needed to protect and prolong the integrity of our aquifers," said Moujahed Achouri, Director of the Land and Water Division of the Food and Agriculture Organization. "The cost of inaction can be enormous. This vision and framework is an urgent call to decision-makers to act now with the right political decisions to help reach globally shared goals of social and economic development." To make groundwater governance a reality, it is necessary to foster cooperation among countries, especially on transboundary aquifers", said Blanca Jimenez-Cisneros, Secretary of the Intergovernmental Council of the UNESCO International Hydrological Programme. Media Contacts
In Washington
Christopher Walsh
Tel : (202) 473-4594
cwalsh@worldbankgroup.org
Nansia Constantinou
Tel : (202) 458-5008
nconstantinou@worldbankgroup.org
In Korea
Zita de Poorter
Tel : (202) 476-0798
zdepooter@worldbank.org


Pressekontakt

The World Bank

DC 20433 Washington

Firmenkontakt

The World Bank

DC 20433 Washington

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